

Application Serial No. 10/800,306  
Filed: 03/12/2004  
Amendment After Office Action  
Attorney Docket No. 03-12896

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims:**

Claim 1 (currently amended). A safety scalpel, comprising:

a blade having an orifice disposed between a sharp end and a substantially straight blunt end, said substantially straight blunt end being disposed opposite said sharp end;

a handle with a front portion adapted to receive said substantially straight blunt end of said blade and securely engage said blade via said orifice; and

a substantially hollow housing configured to retain internally said blade and slide back and forth onto said front handle portion between a first position in which said sharp end of said blade is fully exposed for operational use and a second position in which said sharp end of said blade is fully enclosed within said housing; for safety, said blade being securely engaged by said front handle portion via said orifice in said first and second positions[;], said housing including:

a sliding movement activator ~~on said blade housing;~~ and

an blade disengaging actuator on said blade housing; said actuator configured to disengage said blade from said front handle portion when said blade housing is in said second position.

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Claims 2 - 24 (canceled).

Claim 25 (previously presented). The safety scalpel of Claim 1, wherein said blade disengaging actuator is integrally formed on said blade housing proximate to said sliding movement activator.

Claim 26 (previously presented). The safety scalpel of Claim 1, wherein said handle has a rear grasping portion.

Claim 27 (currently amended). The safety scalpel of Claim 1, wherein said front handle portion is equipped with at least one groove adapted for coupling to said substantially straight blunt end of said blade.

Claim 28 (previously presented). The safety scalpel of Claim 27, wherein said front handle portion is further equipped with means for securely engaging said blade via said orifice.

Claim 29 (currently amended). The safety scalpel of Claim 28, wherein said front handle portion is further equipped with at least one guide channel, said at least one guide channel being flanked on one side by a locking bar ~~on said front handle portion~~.

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Claim 30 (previously presented). The safety scalpel of Claim 29, wherein said blade housing is adapted internally to slide within said at least one guide channel when activated.

Claim 31 (currently amended). The safety scalpel of Claim 28, wherein said front handle portion includes a blade stop in spaced relation to said at least one groove, said blade stop configured to limit the advance of said substantially straight blunt end of said blade when said blade is being securely engaged by said front handle portion.

Claim 32 (previously presented). The safety scalpel of Claim 30, wherein said sliding movement activator includes a stop member adapted to lock said blade housing at opposite ends of said locking bar and slide within said at least one guide channel when said sliding movement activator is pressed toward said locking bar.

Claim 33 (currently amended). The safety scalpel of Claim 28, wherein said blade disengaging actuator is adapted to contact[[s]] said internally retained blade when said blade disengaging actuator is pushed toward said front handle portion while said blade housing is in said second position, said contact causing said blade to disengage from said front handle portion ~~while said blade housing is in said second position~~.

Claim 34 (previously presented). The safety scalpel of Claim 33, wherein said disengaged blade is retained internally by said blade housing.

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Claim 35 (previously presented). The safety scalpel of Claim 34, wherein said blade housing with said internally retained and disengaged blade is decoupled from said handle by sliding said blade housing away from said at least one groove on said front handle portion.

Claim 36 (previously presented). The safety scalpel of Claim 34, wherein said blade is retained internally by said blade housing via a plurality of integral blade retaining members.

Claim 37 (currently amended). The safety scalpel of Claim 36, wherein said plurality of integral blade retaining members includes at least two members adapted to frictionally retain said substantially straight blunt end of said blade within said blade housing.

Claim 38 (previously presented). The safety scalpel of Claim 36, wherein said plurality of integral blade retaining members includes at least one member adapted to frictionally engage said orifice of said blade within said blade housing.

Claim 39 (previously presented). The safety scalpel of Claim 26, wherein said handle is configured with weighting characteristics particular to an individual user.